



State of North Carolina
Office of the Governor

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GOV. EASLEY PROPOSES NATION'S MOST AMBITIOUS EDUCATION BUDGET
2007-2009 Budget Provides \$11.6 Billion for Schools, Colleges and Cuts Taxes for Working Poor

RALEIGH – Gov. Mike Easley today released the nation's most ambitious budget for public education. His budget provides funding for a new "EARN" scholarship initiative that will allow students from low and moderate income families to earn a debt-free university degree. At the same time, the budget expands the early-college *Learn and Earn* program statewide. The budget increases spending for public schools, community colleges and universities by 7.8 percent to \$11.6 billion.

"In North Carolina we place a premium on hard work and it should pay off for our people," said Easley. "Making college more accessible to hard-working students, making high school more relevant and challenging, and making sure low income families can keep their hard-earned dollars for basic needs are North Carolina values."

The Governor's budget expands *Learn and Earn* high schools statewide so that the program can reach every student in every corner of the state. *Learn and Earn* allows high school students to take college courses at high school and earn two years of college credit or an associate's degree with just one extra year of study. His budget calls for \$19 million to establish *Learn and Earn Online* so students in any high school in the state can take college courses over the Internet.

His budget also provides \$150 million for the next two years to send to and graduate more students from college. Low-and-moderate-income students will benefit from a new financial aid program that combines a two-year state grant with current federal assistance that will replace the need for loans if students work 10 hours a week to help pay for their education. Therefore, students who complete the *Learn and Earn* program with two years of college credit will be able to finish their four-year degree at a state university debt free.

In addition, the Easley budget fully funds enrollment increases in the state's public schools, community college and universities to build a skilled workforce prepared to compete for 21st century jobs. It includes a 5 percent average pay increase for public school teachers to fulfill his commitment to surpass the national teacher-pay average by 2008-09. In addition, 10,000 more four year-olds will be added to the *More at Four* pre-K program, which now serves nearly 20,000 at-risk students. Easley also provides money for the Disadvantaged School Supplemental Fund as well as to add literacy coaches and school resource officers.